



Bi-Weekly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for Electoral Engagement #4



Mis- and Disinformation, Monitoring and The Swing of Things

Overview

- The conversation received over 380,000 mentions between 1 and 17 March 2024. The topics which garnered the most attention were related to: (1) News around Jacob Zuma, such as the closure of his accounts by FNB as well as the meetings he has held with various stakeholders across the country; (2) On the groundwork and campaigning conducted by the MK party and the EFF; (3) Conversations aimed at various parties, mainly the ANC, DA and EFF asking South Africans to not vote for a certain party and their reasoning.
- The most-used hashtags during this period, garnering over 10,000 mentions each, were #votemk2024, #voteEFF and #voteEFF2024
 - #votemk2024 was used by authors who sought to make the case for individuals to vote MK. A few of the reasons that these accounts were motivating behind were that the MK party would return the land and that MK had met the requirements to be on the electoral ballot
 - #voteEFF and #voteEFF2024 were used to mobilise support for the EFF. Among those using these hashtags were accounts congratulating the party for receiving a “clean” audit in the City of Ekurhuleni for the 2022/23 financial year. This claim was described as misleading based on [this](#) report.
- We noted posts expressing different opinions on who is to blame for the current state of the country. The general anti-ANC sentiment online is directed towards the ruling party for its poor management of public funds, persistent power cuts and unemployment, among other issues. Criticism has been directed towards the [youth](#) who have to be allegedly begged to register to vote; and those who are believed to be heavily [reliant](#) on government, refusing to lift themselves out of poverty and joblessness through “hard work” and “determination”. Posts expressing variations of this sentiment received mixed responses online.

Elections risks

- The CABC has noted another attack against the Daily Maverick, by the same account [@gentlements](#), which alleges that DM Journalist Rebecca Davis played a role in campaigning for Cyril Ramaphosa’s election to the presidency of the ANC in 2017 and that Davis was funded by the CIA to incite public violence in the country which could then be blamed on the MK party.
 - This constitutes a priority A election risk per SANEFs election risk framework as a particular journalist has been targeted¹. The CABC has begun to monitor posts related to female journalists in particular, who are at heightened risk of online attacks².

¹

<https://sanef.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ANNEXURE-B-Access-to-Information-and-Media-Policy-subcommittee-report-election-risks.pdf>

² <https://www.icfj.org/our-work/chilling-global-study-online-violence-against-women-journalists>

Election Monitoring

- A peak in conversation related to election monitoring was detected on 11 March. This peak was driven by awareness of and stakeholder response to a [letter sent by the Democratic Alliance](#) and constituent parties of the multi-party charter to Western nations seeking assistance and funding to expand local monitoring work for the national elections. Examples of high-engagement posts within this conversation can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
 - Noting that public and expert discourse on this topic has already been featured on news media both over radio, webpages and television. We recommend continued monitoring of narratives around the IEC and potential allegations related to a rigged election or neutered electoral body from across the political spectrum. In trying to garner support for the upcoming elections, political parties need to avoid tactics that undermine the integrity and independence of the IEC.
- We recommend messaging that reminds parties that they can deploy representatives to monitor the election process. Furthermore, we recommend the amplification of civic education tools and civil society campaigns aimed at getting the public involved in election monitoring - (1) [Defend Our Democracy Election Watch](#) ; (2) [Ground Work Collectives Election Monitoring Project](#) and (3) [FuturElect's civics education platform](#)³.

“NomaRally” and Youth Political Alignment

- The CABC has noted the viral nature of posts concerning “[NomaRally](#)”, a nickname given to a young South African who over the past few months has attended a [variety of manifesto launches](#) from the ANC, [MK party](#), the EFF, [IFP](#) and soon to [ActionSA](#).
- We note that while the discourse around NomaRally is humorous - it does reflect lived realities and raises questions around genuine political participation by the youth. Consider an example post from the recent [ANC manifesto launch](#) which reflected that some individuals signed up to attend the manifesto launch as a means to secure transport to visit Durban and the beach.
- We recommend the need for research on manifesto attendance as an antecedent to formal electoral participation, particularly as it pertains to youth in South Africa. We furthermore must acknowledge individual agency as it relates to disillusionment and the conscious act of abstaining from electoral processes as separate from voter abstention across a variety of factors identified in research conducted on the 2021 Local Government Elections⁴.

Mis/Disinformation and Unsubstantiated Allegations

- The CABC has noted the spread of mis- and disinformation by MK-aligned accounts which seek to cast the IEC as an institution which has been captured.
 - In amplifying this narrative, previously identified RET network accounts have alleged that: Ramaphosa has invited the United Nations and United States to South Africa ahead of an impending [civil war](#) ; That [drones should be utilised](#) to track the transport of ballot boxes as the IEC

³ Futurelect launches Civic Education Learning Platform. Empower yourself with the knowledge to engage government, and have your say in how decisions get made and democracy happens. Available now on Apple, Google and Huawei app stores. <https://futurelect.org/download-the-futurelect-app/>

⁴ <https://www.kas.de/en/web/suedafrika/single-title/-/content/analysing-voter-abstention-in-the-2021-local-government-elections>

cannot be trusted; That the CIA will intervene in KZN to ensure that ballots do not reflect votes cast toward parties other than the ANC and that the [metro police are in cahoots with foreign powers to action this](#) - which the [IEC](#) has responded to and refuted

- The use of the term 'allegedly' harks back to content from the disinformation account [@DKNMohammed](#) which has notably begun to focus on producing content for the MK party
- We noted incidents of narrative manipulation targeted towards EFF. Speaking at the party's North West manifesto launch on 16 March, Julius Malema said, "I am not desperate to become President of South Africa. I am desperate to unite the African continent and if the unity of my people is going to cost me votes, you can keep your votes. I don't want xenophobic votes, I don't want the votes of haters...". Some accounts supporting the anti-immigrant narrative misinterpreted this in their posts, alleging that Malema did not want South Africans to vote for him. Examples can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Continued critiques of the EFF, based on the party's pan-African stance, have been noted in the CABC's Xenophobia project reporting.
- The CABC has previously recommended getting ahead of online mis- and disinformation which could be used as a vehicle to cast doubt on the election results. We recommend the archiving of disinformation narratives and posts, as well as fact-checks or refutations from targeted actors, should narratives of post-election contestation arise.

Refinement, Recommendations & Watch List Summary

- The CABC will continue to monitor the online space for mis- and disinformation, attacks on media and attacks on electoral bodies
- Future reports will seek to expand data collection across a variety of other social media platforms
- The CABC recommends the amplification of civic education tools and civil society campaigns aimed at getting the public involved in election monitoring
- The CABC recommends the archiving of disinformation narratives and posts, as well as fact-checks or refutations from targeted actors, should narratives of post-election contestation which reuse manipulated content arise.

Figures and Tables



Figure 1: Top 10 hashtags within the elections conversation between 1 and 17 March 2024

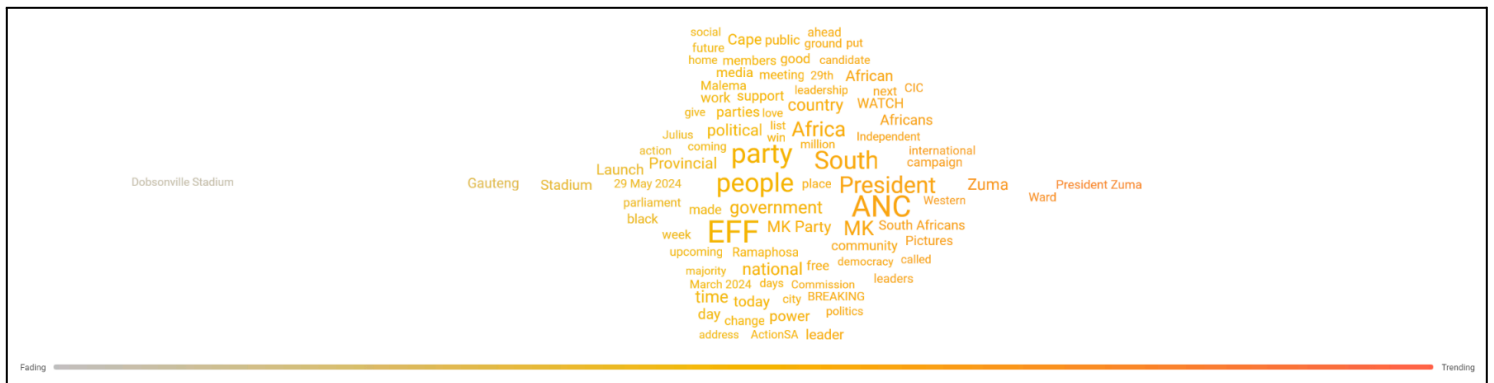


Figure 2: A trend graph which charts high-volume topics which were popular at the beginning of the period (fading) and closer to the end of the reporting period (trending)

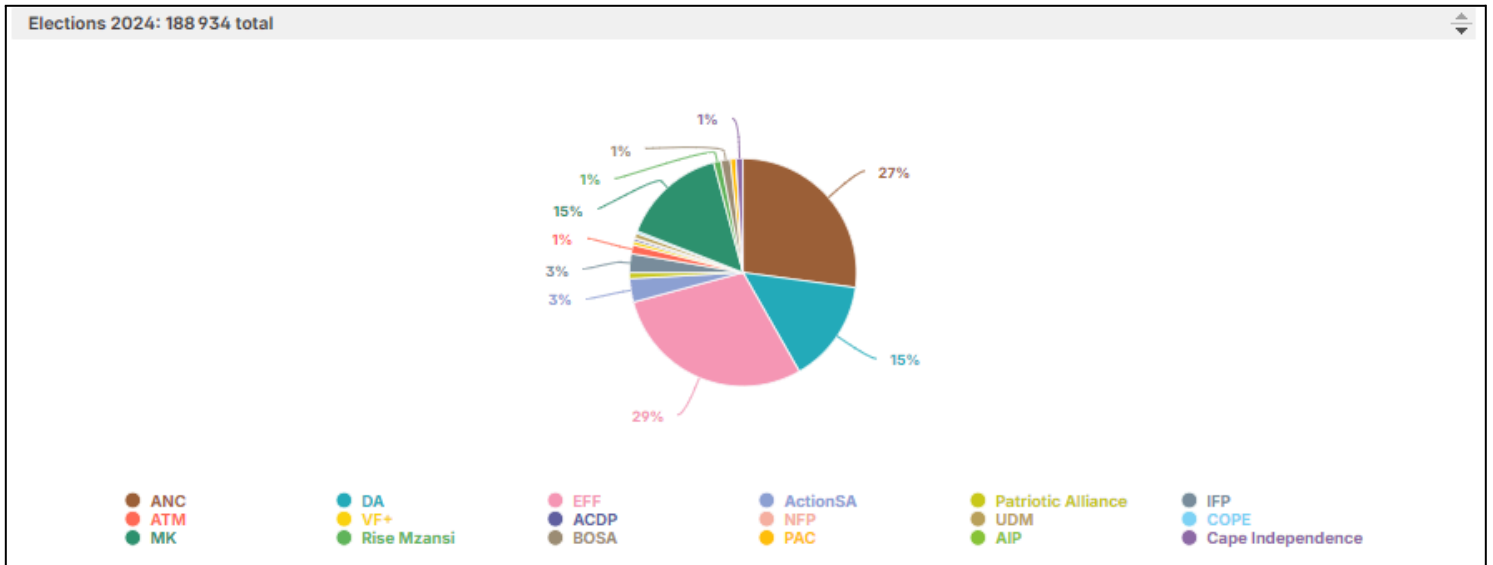


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of mentions containing political party names from 1 to 17 March 2024 (45% of the overall conversation).